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FREEDOM FOR MISSOURI.

LETTER

—OF—

B. GRATZ BROWN.,

—TO THE—

“WEEKLY NEW ERA,” PUBLISHED AT ST. JOSEPH, MO.

St. Louis, April 12th, 1862.

SIR: I rejoice to have received from you the first number of the WEEKLY NEW ERA, a journal devoted to the cause of emancipation in this State; and truly when from the chief city of the “Platte Purchase”—that early and unfortunate concession to slavery, there comes so emphatic a voice demanding to be restored as free soil—it may well be announced as a New Era. It is an era, too, that promises speedy realization to the hopes of many thousands of brave men who have toiled through the dark days of intolerance and persecution in our midst, firm in the faith that time would yet show forth Missouri with freedom blazoned on her front, and sure that they could leave no brighter heritage to their sons than the esteem of having done a sincere work in converting a slave State into a free commonwealth.

With those, and they are many who calculate only the material elements of prosperity, it can no longer be a matter of question that Missouri would be more populous, twice as enterprising, and wealthier by a hundred fold, without slavery than with it. At last, thinking men are all of one mind on that point. It is only those who are interested in slaves as property, and those who cling to the institution from passion, refusing to see any escape from its inherited evils, who now resist the progress of emancipation. The first class—the slave holding class—does not number ten

thousand men; the latter is more numerous and less open to the reception of new ideas. To both, however, there is approaching a solution that will force them to consider this question in another light than that in which they have chosen exclusively to regard it.

The complications in which the finances of our State have become involved, are of so embarrassing a nature, that a repudiation of the public debt stares us in the face. We have got the question of State bankruptcy to grapple with and cast off if we may, and very clear it is that none other than some great measure of relief, that will rapidly repeople our deserted fields, introduce thrift where sloth has heretofore prevailed, and stimulate investment able to meet the demands of a stringent taxation for some years to come, can save this State from such a disgrace. But there is one and only one measure of relief holding out any such prospect. If within eighteen months time Missouri does not stand accredited in the eye of the world as putting forth her will to abolish slavery, not a bond of hers will find a quotation at any stock board; her treasury will be discredited beyond hope, and her soil regarded, both in Europe and America, as a location to be avoided by all who rely upon their own industry. That I do not say this without a warrant, let me show by some specifications not without interest at this moment.

From the Auditor's Report of 1861 it will be gathered, that the bonded debt of the State of Missouri amounted at the close of that fiscal year to \$23,903,000. If we include the unpaid interest of July and January last and that falling due in July next, which is unprovided for, amounting together to \$2,160,000, and the war scrip authorised by the Convention, which is estimated at \$800,000, we shall have in round numbers the sum of \$27,000,000, for which the State is now liable, and the annual interest on which, \$1,620,000, has to be provided for by taxation. The total failure of the several railroad companies to meet the interest on the bonds loaned to them, and the improbability of their being able to do so for years to come, make it necessary that the entire interest on the bonded debt shall be assumed by the State. In addition to this, the amount estimated by the Auditor for the ordinary annual expense of the State Government and for the support of Public Schools is \$570,000. The cost of temporary loans, special appropriations, and incidental matters not estimated for, may be safely set down at \$60,000 more. Thus we have to start with an annual budget of \$2,250,000, and that too without any allowance for the military establishment which will

have to be maintained, in part at least, whenever the United States shall cease to audit the pay roll of our State forces. To meet this outlay, what resources have we? The Auditor, in his report already referred to, estimated the receipts into the treasury from all ordinary revenue sources for the two fiscal years ending September 30th, 1862, at one million seven hundred and sixty thousand dollars—or about \$900,000 a year. But this was predicated upon the receipts of the preceding year, when values were inflated and the scourge of war had not swept over Missouri. At the present time it would be reduced in assessment at least one third, whilst the waste and poverty in some portions of the State may make collecting there of any taxes at all very problematical. Indeed it may be questioned whether, if the existing *status* be continued, a revenue of more than \$500,000 per annum, can be relied on to meet this liability of \$2,250,000 a year.

Is it not very apparent then, that upon this financial exhibit it will require something more than ordinary pro-slavery legislation to avert the calamity of bankruptcy from attaching to Missouri? Equally clear is it also, that before any change for the better or hope of extrication can be had, there will have to be first given some *guarantee for the future*—a guarantee both against rebellion and in favor of labor interests, a guarantee that shall invite capital and people, and civilization to this State, and thus establish a sure groundwork for paying our debts hereafter.

I need scarcely repeat that in my opinion there is no guarantee that will be accepted by the world abroad in this respect except the abolishing or initiating the abolition of slavery. Whatever we may think on the subject, those communities and countries to which we must look for immigration, capital and credit, do so regard it, and that is conclusive. Abolish slavery, and the embarrassments of the financial crisis may be tided over in view of the broad foundation thereby laid for future solvency; but on the other hand, refuse to do so, or even do nothing, and I can see no other fate than repudiation in store for Missouri.

It is true, and no doubt the proposition will be acted upon, that this vast burden of debt, and its corresponding heavy annual interest, can be much diminished and brought within a more manageable limit, by a sale of all the railroads to which State credit has been loaned, receiving bonds in payment therefor. But it must also be remembered, that the same guarantee for the future, that is

necessary to restore our revenue, is even still more indispensable to effect such a sale as that suggested, and induce the investment of millions of capital in railroad enterprise. Such a sale would be an absolute sacrifice and afford no relief to the public debt, from a want of competition among bidders, if no other security for a profitable venture were held out, than our past pro-slavery record, of proscription, rebellion, and bankruptcy.

It is a common and perhaps the most formidable assertion made by those who oppose emancipation, that its cost will be far beyond the ability of this generation to bear. The more thoughtless or malicious do not hesitate to put down the sum at fifty millions of dollars. They say that the State Constitution requires compensation to be first made to slaveholders before any act of emancipation can take effect, that the mode of revising or amending the Constitution in this respect is so tedious and tortuous as to be virtually impracticable, and thence assuming compensation must be made, they frighten off timid men by exaggerating the total amount. Of one thing all may be sure, that whenever this objection is adduced, no matter what cloak or party name the utterers wears, *he is wedded in his heart to the slave system*. But plausible as the argument is sometimes made to appear, it is unsound in deduction and wholly false in application. The thing—the practical deed—slavery extinction, can be accomplished in Missouri in defiance of the bold attempt that has been made by early lawgivers to tie the hands of all after generations, and that at almost a nominal cost to the people of this State. It can be done without infringing a line of the Constitution, and without the cost of five millions—far less fifty millions of dollars. And foremost in the discussion of this subject in its pecuniary bearings, let the fact be borne in mind, that the institution of slavery in the hands of its few proprietors, rests as a blight upon the industry and property of nine hundred and fifty odd thousand non-slaveholders, and it is a matter of vital self-defence, on their part that the speediest methods should be used to initiate its extinction. They have the right to use all moral and political appliances to relieve their own industry and their own property from the incubus, and the duty they owe to posterity demands that they exercise that right. It only needs then, that the non-slaveholding people of this commonwealth shall take into their own hands its ordinary government and say, no longer shall it be administered in the interest of slavery, but rather in sympathy with freedom, and they will have

accomplished in a great part the desired result. None know better than the advocates of the slave system, how entire is its dependence for vitality upon the public opinion of the community where it exists. And none feel more keenly the first breath of moral condemnation that comes from the governing class. I affirm, therefore, that it is only necessary to give body and form to the public will of Missouri—to utter the deliberate verdict of our great State against the longer continuance of slavery within its confines, and the hours will be few that it will linger in the land. In proof of this position I cite the fact, that within the last two years, in the presence of the bare discussion of the subject of emancipation, in view of the uncertain tenure of that species of property, and consequent upon a troubled and conflicting state of society, *the number of slaves in Missouri has been reduced one half*. And this has not cost the State Treasury a single dollar of outlay. But if the half, why not two-thirds—why not the whole? The process is the same. The mere suspicion that there was freedom on the air, made this no longer a congenial home for slave labor. Let the question then of emancipation be agitated freely. The non slaveholding community owes thus much to itself. Let its merits be brought to light in every town and county. Let its influence be shown upon industrial wealth, social elevation, public prosperity, manners, morals, religion, patriotism, in short upon whatsoever slavery has blighted. Let the Landed learn they would be richer, and double the yearly gain from their cultivated farms if they would liberate their slaves forthwith and employ free labor instead. Let the Landless know what it is that deprives them of homesteads and holds it degradation to work. Let none remain who, either from fear, or ignorance, or remoteness, are not familiar with every vulnerable point in the slave system. And in the broad light of such discussion there need be no doubt but that the end will come quickly.

Like all other great reforms that spring from the popular heart, this too must depend in a great measure upon incessant agitation. I do not hesitate to confess myself an “agitator” in this behalf, and an agitator I intend to continue—if life be spared me, until Missouri takes her stand amid the free States of the Great West. And it matters really very little through what process of balloting, or demonstrating, or census taking, the determination of the people of Missouri to have done with slavery and put it out from amongst them, shall be made manifest—only so that it *be* made manifest, so that it be seen and

felt and known by all, that such is the verdict; and even, though in the mysterious providence of God, the insincerest of political trimmers be used to signal the fact, the end will have been accomplished just as well. When that is shown, the number of slaves that will become the subject of the constitutional clause authorising emancipation will be few indeed. Turn against slavery, for its overthrow, the same weapons that have been used so successfully to build it up—the appliances of public sentiment and the bearings of ordinary legislation. Slaveholders finding it no longer reputable, as it has never been profitable, to maintain such a system, will themselves seek for a deliverance from its depressing influence. Many will be glad to obey those impulses of humanity of which they so often speak, and liberate their slaves by individual action. Others may perhaps remove with them to places where the institution still obtains, while a few will clamor for the full price, from Government, of chattels that have ceased to be of any value as such. It has been thus in Pennsylvania, in New York, in every State that has accomplished the extinction of slavery, and the process that has been so effectual there, is the truest method for application here. When the vestiges of the institution shall come to be cleared away by statutes of freedom, I have no doubt that liberality to slaveholders will be the order of the day; but in the meanwhile, and first of all, it is our duty to strike down that fictitious public opinion—that manufactured morality—and that false worship of its power, which has given value and permanence to slavery in the past, and without which it cannot endure for an hour in the future. Do this, and the idol will tumble from its pedestal, exposing the jugglery by which it has been so long palmed off on human credulity, as of divine origin.

Believing, as I do, that the more thoroughly this subject of emancipation is discussed, the more visible will become its practicability, and the swifter its progress from the very fact of agitation, it will not be amiss if I enter my total dissent from so much of that programme, set forth in the New Era, as makes the expatriation of the blacks a condition precedent to their emancipation. As a matter of rigid justice I know of no right to enforce so extreme a penalty when proposing to cancel a great public evil. And as a caprice of mere state craft, I cannot but think that the proposed removal, if insisted on and its adoption made preliminary to all other action, will do more to retard and embarrass the cause of emancipation than any action its enemies could take. It would involve an outlay far beyond the means of our

State, and it is idle to expect pecuniary aid from the U. S. Government in that behalf; for, if compulsory, the Federal power will never co-operate in such a scheme, however willing to aid emancipation in itself or migration when voluntary. Indeed, if a proper policy be pursued in relieving this State from the reproach and ruin of slavery, the change of condition will be sufficiently gradual to avoid those dangers apprehended by some, were an immediate universal liberation of the blacks to take place. Moreover, action and reaction should be equal, and if so many, many thousands of us have thus far borne with their presence as slaves, surely others can endure their abiding as freemen for the term that may fit them for the duties of a new life. To a voluntary colonization, impelled by motives such as brought the Pilgrims to these shores, no objection could be made; on the contrary, it would receive support and assistance in many unexpected quarters; but the argument that assumes all slaves unfit to dwell here when liberated—that enforces expatriation before freedom, is essentially a pro-slavery argument. It calls in question the propriety as well as the right of emancipation at all, whether by individual or State, and draws its chief strength from alleged thriftlessness, immortality and tendency to merge with the white race—allegations utterly at variance with well known facts. Where is the evidence of such proneness to vice and crime on their part? Your penitentiaries and prisons show few freed blacks in them, and those chiefly for offences against the slave code; whilst the aversion in which intermarriage between the races is held—is sufficient evidence of its rarity and sufficient guarantee against its prevalence. Nor are their numbers such as should frighten us into harsh dealings. I find in a late authority that there were, in 1861, more than eighty-three thousand freed blacks in the State of Maryland. Virginia contained fifty-seven thousand five hundred, Pennsylvania, fifty six thousand and upwards, and New York about forty-nine or fifty thousand. In Missouri at the present time there are not more than fifty thousand blacks, both free and slave, but Missouri is twice as large as Maryland, and fully equal in extent, resource and capacity for the support of population to either of the States named. Furthermore, it is a fact, susceptible of the clearest proof, that in not one of those States have the predictions, so lightly uttered in regard to the free blacks, befallen them as a class. Add to this the presumption which all things conspire to justify, that upon the consummation of any act of freedom in this State, so far from having fifty thousand slaves to liberate, there would, in all

human probability, exclusive of the *post nati*, be less than twenty thousand, and I think we may dismiss any apprehension as to injury resulting, or likely to result from the stay of such as remain, and that we need not load the question of emancipation with conditions precedent only calculated to embarrass its achievement.

But after all, there is a higher ground from which we should view such questions. Let us be solicitous chiefly of doing the Right in this grave matter of liberating a down trodden race, and trust that God will so order all its consequences, that they shall redound in benefits likewise.

This communication has already drawn itself out to greater length than I intended, and I must defer, therefore, to some other occasion, a discussion of those measures most suitable at this time for organizing a party of freedom—for establishing societies of support and correspondence in every district, and for disseminating information needful to the full comprehension of the merits of this question by the masses of the people. There is much work to be done, and only those who give to it a willing heart will accomplish anything. Above all, let us not, in initiating this great campaign, make the mistake of shallow politicians, who, by ignoring moral influences as determining the affairs of men, so often fail to realize their confident anticipation. On the contrary, we must comprehend, and teach others to know, that such impulses are mightier than any of the appliances commonly relied on to give shape to government. It is a moral force—aye, almost exclusively a moral force, that is upholding with such signal success, our Federal Executive in this the hour of its trial, supplying innumerable armies, and admirable captains to crush out the most daring, the most adroitly planned, not less than the most wicked rebellion that ever threatened any republic with overthrow. And shall we lose faith in the same power when enlisted in the same cognate cause of freedom, even though resistance and obstacles present themselves in a different guise? No! rather let it nerve us to the performance of our civil duties with increased ardor and utter fearlessness in the presence of so much heroism everywhere uprising around us.

Respectfully, yours,

B. GRATZ BROWN.



